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Carol’s Corner

VERMONT WINS IT!

The State of Vermont is now proud that the Vermont legislature recently passed a bill that will ensure Vermonters access to time off to recover from an illness, or care for a sick family member. Employers who work more than 18 hours per week and 25 weeks per year are eligible. The number of paid sick days will be phased in over time:

- 6 paid sick days per year from 2018-2017; and 5 paid sick days per year in 2018.

The concern is understandable. Too many working families are finding it harder and harder to get by, let alone get ahead. And while the overall economy has been on the rebound since the end of the great recession, the average working family is making less money today than they were decades ago. America’s economy has grown impressively out of balance, favoring those who are already wealthy while leaving the rest of us fall behind.

For women, especially women of color, this out of balance economy has a disproportionate effect. Today women make 80 cents for every dollar a man makes, with a greater disparity for women of color. While women continue to lose out in this unbalanced economy, so, too, will American families.

The out of balance economy we face today is a direct result of policies of corporatist CEOs and special interests manipulating the rules in their favor. This case, Friedrichs v. California Teachers Association, threatens to make it even harder for people like teachers, nurses, and social service workers to band together in a union to speak up for fair wages and treatment at work, and benefits that sustain families. A decision by the US Supreme Court could result in a wave of anti-union activities across the country, with the potential to undermine workers’ pay and benefits for years to come. Although the Court’s decisions do not typically impact National Union Representation, we are all connected, and so the outcome of the Friedrichs case is critical.

The Friedrichs case reaches the US Supreme Court this April, so we must work together now to ensure a fair outcome. Join us in the fight to protect workers’ rights. Together, we can do more than just protect workers at the Supreme Court level; we can create a fair economy for all working families. The rich and their wealthy special interests could make the decisions of the Supreme Court about Friedrichs v. California Teachers Association impact the outcome of the Friedrichs case in the US Supreme Court, just as it did decades ago.

To help ensure a fair outcome for the Friedrichs case and the future of Vermont and American working families, please sign the petition to support working families. This petition will be delivered to the US Supreme Court and the Friedrichs case’s attorneys. You can sign the petition here: https://www.occupywallst.org/freidrichs

We’re making progress, and your contribution is the reason why.

Please continue to support our work. Give today!
FAMILIES WIN IT! (read issue 1)

Building and Supporting Families: Broad and Inclusive Definitions of Family

By Preston Van Vliet,GBTQ Coordinator, Family Values/Work and a Better Balance

Dying Oregon’s statewide paid sick days campaign, a transmasculine individual named Yee Won Chong testified how he has had to relive his family upon seeking political asylum in the United States from his home country of Malaysia. His story speaks powerfully to how our families are made up of more than people who are biologically or legally related. They are loved ones who are with us through our struggles and share our joys. Our families take many forms, including multi-generational families, families of mixed documentation status, single-parent families, LGBTQ families, and chosen families (people who have chosen to share their lives with us and have them, and who they share their lives with us). It’s not surprising to hear that more than 80% of families in the US do not fit the “nuclear family” model of a mom, dad, and their biologically related children. The current definitions of family are not accessible or fair to the diversity of our families, and these narrow family definitions result in families being denied access to much needed support systems. The types of families that are most impacted are often low income, from communities of color and immigrant communities, LGBTQ and/or have disabled individuals.

In Oregon, our peer-led organizing efforts like Together Forward, have been organizing community members, launching campaigns, and building beautiful art about the diversity of families for years. As Moira Bowman, Deputy Director of FV@W and Latifa Lyles, Director of the AFL Women’s Bureau, note: “It’s not surprising to hear that more than 80% of families in the US do not fit the “nuclear family” model of a mom, dad, and their biologically related children.”

Obama signed an Executive Order that guarantees workers of federal contractors the ability to earn up to 12 weeks of paid sick time, to care for themselves or a sick family member, whatever form their families take. Similarly, as momentum increases for state and local paid sick days campaigns, coalitions are pushing to maintain broad family definition language. Unfortunately, in some states laws have passed with such a narrow family definition, employees can’t use their sick time to care for a sibling, grandparent or other loved one.

Many forces help shape the composition of our families and caregiving relationships. Some are biological, some are impacted by who we are in close proximity to, some are serendipitous encounters that help foster caring friendships. But some of these forces are institutional systems - actual laws that both dictate who people can turn to for support as well as perpetuate cultural norms about which families should and should not be supported.

We are charged to change and improve these institutional systems that damage our communities. We are making this change through government actions like Executive Orders, through public policy like Paid Sick Days; or through collective bargaining. The human capacity to build loving families, even in these kinds of oppressive landscapes, is profound, and our nation is stronger when all families can flourish, regardless of how or why they were formed.

CHECKLIST FOR BROAD FAMILY DEFINITION

• Check your CBA for broad definitions of family, include language such as “blood and affinity” where possible.
• Consult your local Pride@Work Chapter on issues related to both contract and legislative language.
• Contact LGBTQorganizing@gmail.com or info@working-families.org for more information on broad family definitions.

WIN IT!

“DID YOU KNOW?

• THE STATUS OF WOMEN IN AMERICA’S SOUTH

In Southern states, women experienced the lowest gender pay gap than in any other region of the nation. But they have greater access to affordable childcare. It is also the case that southern union women work full-time, year round—$205 more per week than their non-union counterparts. The Status of Women in the South was just released by the Institute of Women’s Policy Research (IWPR). It takes a hard look at the economic and political power of women in 14 southern states. For the full report, visit www.statusofwomendata.org

FASCINATING FACTS

• A 2012 STUDY BY THE AMERICAN JOURNAL OF PUBLIC HEALTH titled, Paid Sick Leave and Non-Fatal Occupational Injuries, found that workers with access to paid sick days were 28% less likely than workers without paid sick time to be injured on the job. The research highlighted various factors such as taking medication, exhaustion and the inability to focus on some of the residual effects of presenteeism (better known as being sick at work).